

Call for GNJ to Commit to Inclusive Church

WHEREAS The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference affirms that vital congregations are Spirit-filled, forward leaning communities of believers that grow over time and welcome all people. (Galatians 3:28

WHEREAS the 2012 General Conference of the United Methodist Church retained language in the Book of Discipline which continues to discriminate against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons.

WHEREAS no other marginalized group has been singled out in the Book of Discipline for discrimination or special exclusionary treatment. We believe this is in conflict with our tradition and historic emphasis on God's grace being available to all. The discriminatory language is itself in conflict with the inclusive language in other parts of the Book of Discipline, including the Constitution of our denomination.

WHEREAS we believe that LGBT persons should be embraced as members of the body of Christ, as United Methodists in full standing, and as gifted children of God entitled equally to all of the ministries, ceremonies, and sacraments of the United Methodist Church.

WHEREAS in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly".

WHEREAS the nonviolent Civil Rights movement fought for justice and equality in civil and religious life in the United States with compassion and courage. Yet injustice continues to threaten us, in the United States and in the United Methodist Church.

WHEREAS the recognition of the full humanity, sacred worth and equal rights of LGBT people is crucial to the civil rights struggle of our time. LGBT and straight United Methodist laity and clergy are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.

WHEREAS the continuing denial of full access to all the rights and privileges of church membership in the United Methodist Church is causing deep spiritual harm to our LGBT brothers and sisters and is a threat to us all.

WHEREAS when asked which commandment in the law is the greatest, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

WHEREAS in his sermons "the New Birth" and "The Catholic Spirit," John Wesley taught that as long as we hold in common the essential elements of our faith, and as long as we unite in love, meaning that we love one another, that we commend each other to God in prayer, that we provoke each other to love and to good works, that we love each other not only in word but in deed and in truth, then our hearts are right and we should walk together hand in hand. Wesley further taught that differences of opinion ought not to tear this union of hearts asunder; and whatever forms they present themselves.

WHEREAS the first of Wesley's General Rules is to Do No Harm.

WHEREAS the United Methodist Church claims to be a community of Open Hearts, Open Minds and

Open Doors and to be a church that practices radical hospitality.

WHEREAS the Northeastern Jurisdiction adopted their "Statement of Principle" that "affirms its commitment to the civil and ecclesiastical rights and privileges of all persons, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons, and declares its passionate opposition to continued distinctions of church law that restrict the rights and privileges of LGBT people in The United Methodist Church" in 2012.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference commit to and work for the full civil and ecclesiastical rights and privileges of all persons including LGBT persons, and declares its opposition to continued restrictions of church law on the participation of LGBT people in the United Methodist Church; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we acknowledge when following the Book of Discipline it requires us to do harm and injustice by discriminating against, diminishing, or demeaning our LGBT brothers and sisters, and that we are placed in an impossible situation as to be guided by our Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience or by the Book of Discipline; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church work together to build a fully inclusive church. We commit to be in ministry with all people, regardless of their economic status, race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, or immigration status.

Submitted by Susan Zahorbenski, Lay Member
Reconciling Community of the GNJ Conference

Call for GNJ to Commit to and Support Marriage Equality

WHEREAS when asked which commandment in the law is the greatest, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

WHEREAS the continuing denial of full access to all the rights and privileges in the United Methodist Church is causing deep spiritual harm to our lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender and queer brothers and sisters (LGBTQ) and is a threat to us all.

WHEREAS our membership vows call us "to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves".

WHEREAS we are called to be obedient to the whole of church law which calls the church to be in ministry with all people, including LGBTQ persons.

WHEREAS our Greater New Jersey Annual Conference affirms that vital congregations serve like Christ through justice and mercy ministries (Micah 6:8 and Luke 4:17-21).

WHEREAS the opening section of The Book of Discipline reminds us of serious flaws and shortcomings manifest in the larger history of Methodism. Shortcomings specifically listed include our previous accommodation of racial segregation by establishing a race- based Central Jurisdiction, and our extended denial of ordination rights and prominent leadership roles for women.

WHEREAS the “Social Principles” of The United Methodist Church (Part IV) strongly endorses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with emphasis on respect for the inherent dignity of all persons. Explicitly cited are the full rights of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; and the rights of children, young people, the aging, women, men, immigrants, and persons with disabilities. The list concludes by declaring the full human rights of all persons without regard to their sexual orientation.

WHEREAS it is in the context of these traditions that we must address current shortcomings in United Methodist polity, in particular, forty-three years of prejudicial language portraying the life practices of gay and lesbian persons as “incompatible with Christian teaching,” a standard that has excluded them from ordination, from marriage, and in some cases even from church membership (Judicial Council Ruling 1032). These exclusionary principles are prominent components of the “chargeable offenses” assigned to the “Judicial Administration” (chapter 7, par. 2702). Such unjust rules, combined with the prosecution of clergy who refuse to uphold them, are themselves incompatible with United Methodist visions of inclusiveness, which call for “Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors.”

WHEREAS the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference is part of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, which adopted the “Statement of Principle” that states the denomination is in error in its stance on the practice of homosexuality and urged United Methodists to operate as if that position does not exist.

WHEREAS the State of New York recognized same-sex marriage on July 24, 2011, New Jersey recognized same-sex marriage on October 21, 2013, and Pennsylvania recognized same-sex marriage on May 20, 2014.

WHEREAS Our Annual Conference consists of parts of New York, parts of Pennsylvania, and the entire state of New Jersey.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference and the United Methodist Churches of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference make a public statement supporting and upholding Marriage Equality.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference and the United Methodist Churches of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference will support our clergy who take the bold and faithful stand to minister to all equally and include all in the life of the church, which includes but is not limited to, conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies where it is civically legal to do so.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference and the United Methodist Churches of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, will support clergy spiritually, emotionally, and

prayerfully who are brought up on charges for conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.

Submitted by Susan Zahorbenski, Lay Member
Reconciling Community of the GNJ Conference